-- In order to illustrate the manner in which the above-recited and other advantages of the invention are obtained, a more particular description of the invention briefly described above will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments thereof which are illustrated in the appended drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings in which: --

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 11, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- In reference to Figure 2, prevention or reduction of the likelihood of oxidation of upper surface 16 of interconnect 12 is accomplished during the formation of ILD layer 18. This is carried out by an *in situ* passivation of upper surface 16 of interconnect 12, immediately prior to or simultaneously with the formation of ILD layer 18, which avoids the problems of the prior art. --

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 10, line 4, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- The chemical compound is provided in an amount sufficient to substantially chemically cover upper surface 16 of interconnect 12 in order to chemically protect approximately the first 1-1,000 atomic lattice layers thereof. The chemical compound may be a nitride form of the metal of which interconnect 12 is composed. Where

ammonia, a hydrated nitrogen compound or the like is used, a chemical structure such as $M\text{-}N\text{-}H_x$ forms, where M represents the metal of which interconnect 12 is composed. --

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 16, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- Following the formation of ILD layer 18, further processing is carried out as illustrated in Figure 5. Second depression 34 is formed into ILD layer 18 by patterning and etching thereof. In a damascene process such as that illustrated in Figure 5, second depression 34 is formed substantially above interconnect 12. Second depression 34 may be, by way of non-limiting example, a wiring trench such that metallization within second depression 34 would run in and out of the plane of Figure 5. Additionally, second depression 34 may be a contact corridor such that metallization would run left to right, substantially within the plane of Figure 5 along the upper surface 36 of ILD layer 18 and filled into second depression 34 such that a metallization line with a contact is formed, whereby the contact is in electrical communication with interconnect 12. --

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 18, line 1, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims and their combination in whole